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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development:
Review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes
of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

Statement submitted by Foundation for the Rights of the Family, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.5/2001/1

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The family is universal, the cornerstone of society, a unit of production and consumption. It is essential to the education and socialization of children and youth and to the stabilization of adults. It is the place where children, the elderly, the sick and disabled receive emotional and practical support.

The family unit is also a powerful agent of social change. Factors such as demography, fertility, ageing population, environment, social welfare and development are ultimately influenced by family behaviour and by the decisions taken within the family unit.

The family, in turn, is influenced by external factors, among others, modernization, technology, poverty, armed conflicts and natural disasters. This causes the family to be extremely vulnerable and to require support from society and the State.

In resolution 54/124 the General Assembly recognizes that "the basic objective of the follow-up to the International Year of the Family should be to strengthen and support families in performing their societal and developmental functions and to build upon their strengths ..."

At the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, held in Geneva, 26-30 June 2000, repeated reference was made to the squalid conditions in which so many people in poor countries live. They are an affront to our common humanity, and no country can be called prosperous when so many people are left to fend for themselves against ignorance, hardship and disease.

A rising number of families are living in poverty, especially single-parent families. In many parts of the world families are enduring the consequences of globalization and the impact of sanctions.

Although in times of deep trouble the sense of family ties is a source of strength, extreme poverty can destroy, displace and separate families; in this situation, children, who are denied the right to be cared for, are the most vulnerable.

In resolution 54/124, "Follow-up to the International Year of the Family", adopted on 20 January 2000, the Secretary-General is requested to report to it, at its fifty-sixth session, through the Commission for Social Development and the Economic and Social Council, on the appropriate ways and means to observe the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004.

Conclusions

To eradicate poverty and to improve social protection systems of poor and vulnerable families should be a priority target.

Families should be supported and empowered to fulfil their multiple functions and responsibilities and to realize their rights, with policies and programmes based on a functional and global approach to the family as basic provider of social security and protection.

It is necessary to increase awareness of family issues and problems and to promote knowledge of economic, social and demographic processes affecting families and their members.

There is a need to foster equal participation of men and women in family responsibilities and tasks, with the possibility for both to reconcile paid work and family life.

A review of the global situation of the family in 2004 should be included in the next programme of work of the Commission for Social Development.

As suggested by the General Assembly in resolution 54/124, the global situation of the family should be reassessed by the Commission for Social Development when adopting its next programme of work.

The follow-up to the International Year of the Family now has a clear target: the tenth anniversary in 2004. This requires close collaboration between the Family Unit, within the Division for Social Policy and Development, United Nations Secretariat, and non-governmental organizations. It is to be hoped that this cooperation will materialize into international meetings and other activities for the preparation for, and observance of, the tenth anniversary.

Another important feature of the tenth anniversary could be the preparation, by an open-ended working group of the Commission for Social Development, of a declaration on the roles, rights and responsibilities of the family. Such a declaration could be based on provisions already existing in United Nations instruments, on statements on the family contained in reports of United Nations international conferences and also on documents prepared to this effect by non-governmental organizations.